

6
England's Causes for Thankfulness.
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A
SERMON,

PREACHED

ON THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A GENERAL THANKSGIVING,

NOVEMBER 1798.

By A CURATE IN THE COUNTRY.

"And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites."
St. Luke 21. 2.

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A

SERMON, &c.

PSALM 147. 12, 13.—“ *Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion: For he hath strengthened the Bars of thy Gates; he hath blessed thy Children within thee.*”

THE employment, my Brethren, for which we are now assembled; to acknowledge the goodness, and celebrate the praises of the Lord of Hosts, is the noblest that *can* occupy the attention of creatures. To secure *this service*, and shew himself *worthy* of it, is a grand object with Jehovah, in the display of his perfections, in all his works and ways. It is the employment of the blessed Spirits in heaven. It will be our employment, and constitute our felicity, when, freed from the encumbrances of these mortal bodies, we are admitted into their exalted society. It has ever been the delightful employment of all true saints on earth. Hence it is, that the exercise of this duty is so highly extolled, and so strenuously insisted on, every where in scripture. The Book of Psalms is little else than one continued song of praise from beginning to end. Every blessing we enjoy, whether of a temporal or spiritual, a private

or public nature, is here represented as supplying *matter* for this work; and *every creature*, yea *all nature*, is summoned to join in it. It is enforced upon the ancient church and people of God on a variety of grounds in the short Psalm before us; and among the rest, for *national blessings* and distinctions; for protection from the *enemy without*, and peace and other privileges *at home*. "*Praise the Lord,*" saith the devout prophet, "*O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion: For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed the children within thee.*"

I TRUST you will see with what propriety this exhortation may at present be applied to us as a nation; and that in proportion as we *enjoy the blessings* it mentions, we shall regard the *duty* flowing from them.—Let us then attend to a few of the *causes for thankfulness* and praise to God which our public affairs now afford.

THE *first* of these which obviously suggests itself is,—That we have been *preserved from those dreadful calamities* so many other nations have groaned under, and continued in the possession of so great a portion of our comforts.

Calamities, the very *worst of calamities* that can be experienced on this side hell, have long stalked on every side of us. Almost every surrounding nation has been the scene of war, bloodshed, confusion, violence, plunder, and every other enormity at which religion and humanity shudder.—The thunder we have heard thus roar at a distance has frequently seemed approaching us. The storm which has
thus

thus desolated every *neighbouring shore*, has seemed just ready to burst upon *ours*. Things have indeed worn a gloomy aspect. The hearts of many have been sad, and nearly failed them, in the prospect. Our enemies triumphantly successful in *every other quarter*, and vowing the very heaviest vengeance against *us*. Iniquity, sedition, treason, and other symptoms of confusion displaying themselves at home. According to all human appearance our situation was truly alarming. This we have frequently lamented to God in this place, and “with fasting, and weeping, and mourning,” importuned his interposition and aid. And why is it that we have hitherto suffered so little? Why is it that these impending calamities have hitherto been averted? Why is it that we yet exist as an independent people and nation, and can thus sit each under our own vine and our figtree with none to make us afraid? Surely it is owing to no other cause than that mentioned by the grateful Prophet;—“*It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*”—— Surely we must adopt this acknowledgment of the Psalmist;—“*If the Lord had not been on our side, now may England say; if the Lord had not been on our side, when men rose up against us, they had SWALLOWED US UP QUICK, when their WRATH WAS SO HOT against us; the waters had OVERWHELMED us, the stream had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.*”

We are poorly acquainted with our religion if we ascribe our preservation to any other cause than the kind providence of God toward us. We know very little of the *real-wretchedness* of those

places which are the seats of War and Rebellion; if we are not *most cordially thankful* that our Land is preserved from such scenes. *These judgments*, under their mildest form, must ever be attended with unspeakable miseries: But when, as in the present case, the chief agents in them are lost to every principle of religion, humanity, and common decency; when all the corrupt, malignant, and diabolical passions in human nature are avowedly loosened from restraint; when, to carry on the work of the Devil; to banish religion, order, and morality, and to propagate infidelity, confusion, and licentiousness over the whole globe, is their *professed* object; when War thus becomes a thousand times more horrible than even its own cruel nature renders necessary, in what terms of urgent importunity can it *then* be sufficiently deprecated? In what strains of heart-felt gratitude can we sufficiently express our thankfulness to God that the scene of it has hitherto been distant from us?

WHERE is our *self-interest*, the thing that last of all forsakes us, if we are not thankful that the *security* of our possessions is preserved, and they are not delivered into the hands of the plunderer? Where is our affection for our *families*, our Wives, our Daughters, and our Sons, if we are not thankful they are not led as sheep to the slaughter, or in the Arms of the Russian? Where is our regard for our *religion*, these blessed opportunities of assembling in this place, and those other numberless advantages of a spiritual nature we so eminently enjoy in this nation, if it does not fill our mouths with praise that they are not torn from us? Where is our regard for our God, our blessed Saviour

Saviour and Redeemer who shed his own precious blood for us, if it does not inspire our hearts with gladness that his character is yet *publicly* revered in our Land, and not by legal right and authority blasphemed and annihilated?—I mention not *imaginary* evils. This loss of property, of liberty, of civil, social, and domestic comforts, of religious privileges, of religion itself, are universally experienced; this avowed infidelity and blasphemy every where obtain, where our enemies have rule.

To us however, thro' the superabundant goodness and mercy of God, these blessings have been uninterruptedly continued. We can scarce pretend to have suffered *at all*, save in our purses; and this surely only in a measure that may be well endured. We have parted with little, save our *superfluities*, if with *these*. Whatever clamour may have been made, *none* have been deprived of the *necessaries* of life, and not *many* of the *comforts* of it, through our national burthens. And let us only compare *what we have lost*, with what is *still preserved* to us, or with *what every other nation* engaged in the War has suffered, or with what *our iniquities have deserved*, and so far from uttering a murmur, we shall pour forth the devoutest strains of gratitude.—Let us then be sensible of our mercies, and make a proper use of them. Let the view of them endear to us the character of our compassionate God. Let it make us ashamed of our baseness and ingratitude toward him. And let the genuine language of our hearts at all times be;—"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all

thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

THE next ground for national thankfulness and praise to God I shall mention is,—The *immense honour he has conferred on this nation* in the great contest now carrying on in the world.

MEN who disregard the scriptures of truth, or who, pretending to regard them, give way to their own wild and imaginary conjectures in their interpretation, may say *what they please*; they may see *this* or the *other* advantage resulting from the successes of these monsters in wickedness with whom we are at issue, and talk as if in the secrets of heaven; they may hence "*justify the wicked in hope of reward,*" of a system of things more favourable to themselves, and become the apologists of the grossest enormities that ever disgraced corrupted human nature: But, while there is any difference between *right* and *wrong*, between *good* and *evil*, or *one word of truth* in the Bible, their notions are wholly insupportable. The French, it cannot be too well understood, or too often repeated, have made *bad worse* wherever they have obtained footing, in *every* point of view. They have left men in an infinitely worse state than they found them in respect to *religion*, as well as their temporal interests. In the room of a *Divine Religion* corrupted by *superstition*, they have *publicly* and with the *sanction of their laws and government*, implanted *Atheism*, *Deism*, and the very grossest and most mischievous of morals. In respect therefore

therefore to the present religious state of all whom they have thus enlightened and reformed, our principles authorize us to say, A Papist *may* be in a state of salvation, an avowed Infidel *cannot*.— And, in respect to the prospect of their conversion to real christianity, they must know little of the diabolical scorn and ingenuity of the genuine disciples of Voltaire, Rousseau, and our own Arch-libeller of truth, who do not consider the most superstitious persons, who reverence the Bible, and the ordinary distinctions between good and evil, more hopeful subjects than they are. To say that God can effect the requisite change in them, is to say nothing; because surely he equally could convert the nominal and superstitious believer.

But were the case otherwise, we are expressly forbid to “do evil even that good may come.” Were we *sure* that good, the general good, would follow the desolations our enemies are making; still, they are only acting the part of Judas; it highly becomes those, therefore, who wish them *good speed*, or who do not, according to their ability, withstand and oppose them, to consider our Lord’s denunciation against him. We believe, it is our most pregnant source of consolation, that under a government conducted by infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, all things must *ultimately* terminate for good. But the good which the Great Sovereign of the World causes to arise out of evil, is no excuse whatever for the perpetrators of that evil. The moment we depart from the *line of right conduct* marked out in the Bible, we must class ourselves among the wicked and unbelieving, and expect their portion. If this is not clear in religion,
nothing

nothing is. "*He only that doeth righteousness, is righteous. He that committeth sin,*" knowingly and deliberately, under any pretence whatever, "*is of the Devil.*" And "*he, saith our Divine Master, who denieth me before men, him also will I deny before my Father who is in heaven.*" "*Woe, saith the Prophet, unto them that call evil GOOD, and GOOD EVIL; that put DARKNESS for LIGHT, and light for darkness.*" "*If, saith the Apostle John, speaking of the doctrine of Christ, there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for HE THAT BIDDETH HIM GOD SPEED, IS PARTAKER OF HIS EVIL DEEDS.*"

THERE is a cause of God, of truth, and of righteousness in the world; and there is a cause of the Devil, of sin, and of confusion. And all who adhere to the one must be the determined enemies of the other. "*He, saith our Lord again, that is not WITH me, is AGAINST me.*"—These two causes, or kingdoms, have ever been opposed to each other since the first introduction of sin into the world; but never perhaps were the enemies of God and goodness more undisguised and audacious than in the present day.—And *now mark* the situation in which this nation has stood, and the part it has acted in the present contest. A *regular system* has been planned with satanic subtilty, and acted upon with unexampled zeal, for the *subversion of every regular government*, and the *extirpation of the christian religion*, and the very name of our Redeemer, from the world. This fact is unquestionable. It has been proved by some late authors* with evidence equal to that of demonstration. It is indeed the system professed by the French themselves.

* Professor Robinson, and Abbè Barruel.

selves. These are the principles in which they glory, and which they have reduced to practice wherever they have come. These are the principles they have laboured to propagate by the most enormous sacrifices, and unparalleled exertions.—Holland, Prussia, Spain, Germany, and every other neighbouring Power, through necessity, cowardice, mistaken interest, or total want of principle, submitted to, or joined them. England stood alone in *this mighty cause* against this *mighty foe*. Success rendered him more fierce and implacable. She might well therefore be said, “*to wrestle not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*”—Her courage however does not shrink. Her *rulers* remain firm; her *people* support them. Knowing the *goodness*, as well as the *importance*, of her cause, and looking to God for aid, in spite of every misrepresentation she has bravely persevered in it.

AND what an honourable situation is this for any nation to stand in! What a highly favoured spot of the globe must this be! What! is there *no king* endowed with so much piety, *not one* amongst all those of the surrounding nations, who so justly deserves to be entitled The “*Defender of the faith,*” as *our* beloved Monarch? Is there no government endowed with sagacity to *discern*, no people with intrepidity to *withstand*, this mystery of iniquity, like *ours*? Does the preservation of good order, of morality, of true religion, in this nation, in Europe, in the whole world, turn in any degree upon the hinge of *our* instrumentality? How then could a more exalted distinction be put upon

upon us? This is indeed making us what God promised to make his ancient people, "*high above all nations which he hath made in praise, in name, and in honour.*" And what ought not to be our sensations of gratitude towards him? What are *we*, or what is our Country, that God should thus deal with us!

We say not that *all* those who conduct our public affairs are actuated by genuine christian principles. Where men's *actions* are right we have little concern with their *motives*. This is the business of him who knows the heart. Some of them, there is no doubt, are as upright in their intentions, and as sincere christians, as any who censure them can be. It is sufficient however to justify our view of the matter that they *profess* to reverence God, and our holy religion, while our enemies, in their public capacity, *professedly* revile them.—The contest then, on our part, is unquestionably most honourable. We go out in the name of the Living God against these uncircumcised Philistines who proudly blaspheme and despise him. And what sacrifices are too great to make in a cause like this? What Briton, what Christian, would not exert every nerve rather than be overcome in it? What is *property*, what is *life* itself, in comparison of *this object*? How could either be disposed of more gloriously? It would have been highly honourable only to have *attempted* such an enterprise, had we been wholly worsted in it. Having "*behaved ourselves thus valiantly in the cause of our Country, and our God, we might well have left him to do what seemed him good.*" What matter then have we not for
praise

praise in the next particular I shall instance; namely,

THAT he has made us so *signally successful in the undertaking*. Surely *this* will extort our most heart-felt gratitude.

We have not, it is true, obtained the ultimate end of our wishes in the transaction, *peace*; a peace consistent with the liberty, religion, and happiness of Europe. It becomes us therefore to "*rejoice with trembling*;" and while "*we sing of mercies, to remember judgments*." Humility, the most unfeigned humility, at all times becomes us. We have however that for which we ought to be most cordially thankful. We have as evident marks of the Divine interposition on our behalf, as in those days it seems almost possible to have. What was ever more obviously so than the dispersion of the enemy's fleet off the Irish Coast? What, in the ordinary course of human events, approaches so near a *miracle* as the series of our successes at sea? *They* who have traversed the *almost insurmountable Alps*; *they* who have subdued every other nation around them; *they* who have proved invincible before every other power, have sunk like lead in the sea before a bandful of Britons. Where in the whole annals of history do we read of *five successive naval victories in one war*, equal in splendor and importance to those with which we have been favoured?—Where did we ever hear of schemes projected with such sagacity, or executed with such energy, of such *prodigies* of magnanimity and valour, as have been displayed by our renowned statesmen and commanders?—

"Such

“*Such men, as our admired Christian Poet observes, are raised to station and command; When providence means mercy to a land. He speaks, and they appear; to him they owe, Skill to direct, and strength to strike the blow, To manage with address, to seize with power The crisis of a dark designing hour.*”

THE advantages of the two victories for which our grateful acknowledgments are now especially demanded are incalculable. — The *one* gave a most seasonable and severe blow to the horrid insurrection which has occasioned such miseries in the sister kingdom, and which, if it had not been checked, might have endangered the safety of our *own*. — The *other* has been equally wonderful in its effects as brilliant in itself. — It has confused the councils, and frustrated the most deeply projected schemes, of the enemy: It has greatly diminished his power of annoyance, and in the same degree increased our power of resistance: It has excited a most formidable combination against him: It has shut the mouths of his vaunting adherents: It has raised the drooping spirits of all the friends of order and religion: It has astonished the globe! — These are among its obvious *present* effects. What its ultimate consequences will be time must discover. There is, we trust, room to hope, it will prove the *turning point* in the grand combat, and lead to our final success in it; to the humiliation of the proud and impious foe; the preservation of true religion in the world; and the restoration of peace, order, and happiness among men. — In this case, how will *all Europe*, the *whole World*, yea, *Nations yet unborn*, have cause to bless God for what he has done by us. — With what

what joy shall we then adopt and apply to the boasting enemy, especially to their vaunting and impious Champion, the language of Israel over the King of Babylon, the Buonaparté of those days:—" *The whole earth is at rest and is quiet; they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and the Cedars of Libanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, who didst weaken the nations! For thou badst said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.*"——"*Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms, that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof!*"——This part of it we may with propriety now apply:—" *Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming; it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth: It hath raised from their thrones all the Kings of the nations.*"

At any rate, by all those important victories "*God has strengthened the Bars of our gates,*" our natural Barriers, wonderfully secured us from all hostile attempts from without, united us more firmly at home, and thus "*blessed our children within us.*"——Let us only bear in mind what the most celebrated of our Heroes in the very moment of success so beautifully acknowledged, That the glory of all belongs to "*Almighty God!*" He only it is who endoweth men with wisdom, courage, and intrepidity, "*who teacheth their hands to war, and their fingers to fight, and who giveth us the victory in battle.*"——"*Not unto us therefore, not unto us, but unto his name be the praise.*"

These

These then are a few of the causes afforded us for a general thanksgiving.——We have been mercifully preserved from those desolating calamities which have overspread many other nations, and continued in the peaceable possession of many distinguishing blessings.——We have had the greatest honour put upon us in being made chief instruments in the hands of providence of opposing the progress of wickedness, confusion, and infidelity, and supporting the cause of virtue, order, and religion.——We have been signally, repeatedly, almost miraculously crowned with success in the enterprise.——“O let us then go our way into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and speak good of his name; for the Lord is gracious, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth from generation to generation.”—And let us above all things be careful, to “shew forth his praise not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days.”

ALL his favours and tender mercies are intended as so many cords of love with which he may draw us nearer to himself: They are continual displays of his own excellencies and glories, and should induce us continually to look to him for our happiness.—The end of all his distinguishing kindnesses to the Jewish nation was, “to make them his PECULIAR people who should keep his commandments; and that they might be an HOLY PEOPLE unto the Lord their God.”—Let this then be the use we make of his mercies. Let every new discovery of his goodness lead us to a more deep and unfeigned repentance for our transgressions against him.

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Let it induce us more unreservedly to chuse him for our portion; more unreservedly to devote our bodies and souls to his service; that so our whole lives may be an expression of our gratitude to him.

In particular,—Let the consideration of the deplorable calamities we are so peculiarly preserved from, and the distinguishing national blessings we yet enjoy, suppress in us every tendency to murmuring and complaining. Let us ever keep in mind how much more we enjoy than we deserve, and how great indeed our privileges are in comparison of those of any other people under heaven.—Let the consideration of the *great cause* in which our Governors are engaged guard us against *every misrepresentation* of their views and conduct. Let it induce us cheerfully to submit to whatever further burdens their wisdom may deem necessary. How *can we prevent evil*, how *can we do good*, on a larger scale? How *can we act more like men*, and like *christians*?—And, let the consideration of the great things God has already done for us inspire us with confidence that, in his own time and way, he will accomplish all our proper wishes; that he who *has delivered will deliver* till we are secure from every danger. To this end, let us continue in the use of all proper means, and especially those of fervent and importunate prayer. And let us beg not merely for *deliverance*, but that *God's hand* may be *visible* in it; that it may make an *incontrovertible display* of his righteous character, and superintending providence, now so disregarded and despised; “*that his enemies may see it and be ashamed*,” being constrained to acknowledge “*that it is his work*,”

work;" and that hence "*his ways may become more known upon earth, his saving-health among all nations.*"

ABOVE all, let every present favour and deliverance we experience from God remind us of that "*exceeding great love wherewith he hath loved us in Christ Jesus,*" and of our glorious redemption through him. Let it be the leading object of our lives to secure an interest in this "*great salvation.*" Let the awful dispensations we now witness on the earth teach us to stand *more habitually* convinced of the vanity and instability of all worldly glory, and that "*here we have no continuing city.*" Let it teach us *more uniformly* to look to him for our happiness, who amidst all the changing scenes of created existence, remains invariably the same; and who, when not only Kingdoms and Empires, but the World itself shall pass away, will be the never-failing ever-satisfying portion of all who have put their trust in him.—*Then* shall we be prepared to meet every event as becomes us; *Then* shall we never be so elated with success as to forget that we are *men*, and only *safe* when we are humble: *Then*, under the most gloomy aspects, we may rejoice in the reflection, "*that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth:*" *Then* may we contemplate undismayed not only every vicissitude of *time*, but the dissolution of our present bodies, and "*the vast concerns of an eternal scene:*"—For *then*, whatever may befall us during our toilsome pilgrimage *here*, we shall soon reach a more tranquil kingdom, join a more perfect society, and in a more perfect manner celebrate God's righteous Providence and matchless Grace for ever and ever.



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